

Specialty Crop Priority Meeting Minutes

Fri, Dec 18, 2015 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM Mountain Standard Time

Present: Jim Auer, Tracy Dougher, Georgana Webster, Angie Nelson, Nina Zidack, Jessica Rupp, Pat McGlynn, Christy Clark, Mac Burgess, Claude Smith, Treston Vermandel, Joe Willauer, August Uhl, Zach Miller, Jessie Hunter, Brent Sarchet, Jolene Bach, Mary Burrows, Michelle Flenniken, Steph Hystad.

Not present: Liz Werk, Jackson Dion, Dan Lloyd

Intro of committee

- Tracy Dougher- MSU – Professor in plant science and pathology
- Pat McGlynn – Flathead County Extension Agent
- Treston Vermandel – Montana Department of Agriculture
- Georgana Webster- Organic Program Manager for Montana Department of Agriculture

Overview of SCBG

- Jim provided the goal description for Agriculture Development Division and Specialty Crop Block Grant.
- Jim outlined how the priorities are used by the Director of Montana Department of Agriculture in making decisions on what proposals are submitted to USDA

Review of the 2015 SCBG Priorities

- Members of the committee provided thoughts on the 2015 priorities.
 - o Pat – pest management assistance for farmers – cherry growers interest in monitoring spotted wing drosophila program – would this fall under that category? Jim – yes.

Public Comment of 2015 priorities

- Treston – Asked about opportunities for co-ops, individuals, etc. to apply for funding to address infrastructure needs?
- Jim- explained that it is hard to pay for anything that attaches to the ground. Could help development of a co-op, or development of plans for the physical structure, just can't do capital improvements.
- The group agreed to modify the priority related to infrastructure to read "Planning and Supporting Infrastructure" to be more clear that purchasing infrastructure is not allowable under the grant.
- Jim – are there emerging issues in the work of specialty crop that are not addressed here?
- Pat – tourism/agritourism conference a few weeks ago – other states have used this to help farmers bring diversity to their farms – host an activity on the farm to increase their revenue.
 - o Not added as a specific goal, but leave it under the priority of value added production.

Public Comment

- Emerging concerns? Other things that should be on there?
- Christy – hobby explosion in the honey bee business. There is a need to ensure that bee testing operations at Montana Department of Agriculture are maintained at the current level to protect the industry.
- Jim- Clarified that honey bees are an eligible crop under this funding source. Link them to almonds – their product is considered a specialty crop by the USDA.
- Jim added that other insects may be eligible too, as long as a connection can be drawn to specialty crops.
- Georgana would suggest that we should add the category “beneficial insects” to the list of the priorities.
- Zach – could we make it even broader and say “beneficial organisms”, not just insects.
- Does it belong in research or farmer education? Response- both.
- Georgana sees that many farmers don’t know how to use organisms on their farms – put in both.
- Jim added “use of beneficial organisms” to both farmer education and research categories.

Finalization of priorities

- Voting by the committee members to approve the 2015 list with the following changes:
 - o “planning and supporting infrastructures”
 - o Added “use of beneficial organisms” to farmer education and research priorities
 - o All present committee members voted for these proposed priorities.
- Jim will take the list and present to Director de Yong
- Jim will be posting the Funding notice by end of next week, 12/24. Will do media around the announcement. RFP will be on the website.
- Proposals likely due 2/24/16.
- Call Jim at 444.5424 with questions.